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SUBJECT: EGYPT ARRESTS FACEBOOK ACTIVISTS

REF: A. CAIRO 730
[B.](#) CAIRO 930

1.(SBU) On July 23, Egyptian security forces in Alexandria arrested 26 members of a Facebook social networking group known as the "6th of April Youth." Fourteen of the activists were briefly jailed and, according to the East Alexandria Attorney General, are under investigation on charges that they "caused a public disturbance" and "disrupted traffic in an attempt to stage street riots." Charges against them also include "possession of publications aiming to spread rumors and subversive ideas among Egyptians." According to press reports, police arrested 14 of the detainees while they were walking on the streets of Alexandria "singing nationalist songs" in an ad hoc demonstration on the occasion of Egypt's 1952 "revolution." Police arrested the 12 others separately.

2.(SBU) According to press reports and our contacts, on July 27 the Alexandria Appeals Court ordered the release of the fourteen jailed activists. However, as of mid-morning on July 28, the fourteen detainees remain in custody. The GoE could potentially appeal the release order or, if the activists are freed, re-arrest them under Egypt's Emergency Law.

3.(SBU) The Facebook group first gained attention when it called for a national strike in April in support of striking textile workers in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla. The call for the strike led to the April arrest of one of the group's leaders, Israa Abdel Fattah, who was released without charges after seventeen days in custody (ref A). The group also called for a May 4 strike to protest rising food prices (ref B). Among those reportedly arrested on July 23 was Ahmed Maher Ibrahim, one of the founders of the group, whom Egyptian authorities briefly detained in May. The Washington Post profiled Ibrahim in a May 18 article.

4.(SBU) On July 27, we raised the arrests and expressed our concern to the Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights, who said that although he was aware of the arrests, and had learned from Egypt's embassy in Washington of the extensive media attention the arrests are attracting, the Ministry was still gathering information and had no comment. He said he hoped the MFA would have a response to our inquiry later in the week.

5.(SBU) Comment: The arrest and brief detention of the twenty-six activists is a worrisome indicator that the GoE's tolerance for political activities on websites such as Facebook apparently continues to diminish. We will continue to track the status of the jailed activists who were ordered released.

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